

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WARFARE:

## Local Chiefdoms and Settlement Systems in the Jenin Region during the Ottoman Period of Palestine

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**W**arfare and chiefdoms are old global phenomena that, to a certain extent, affected the cultural landscape of the Jenin region. According to historians, local warfare and the rising power of chiefdoms in the Jenin region of Palestine during the Ottoman period destroyed villages and greatly disrupted the settlement pattern. However, history often highlights the role of elites and ignores the role of peasants and agrarians (*fellahin*) in shaping the cultural landscape of the region. It is left to archaeology to recover the material culture of these people and reconstruct daily life during this time. The *fellahin* represented a substantial unit of “dynamic stability” and maintained a settlement system that had been established as early as the Middle Bronze Age. In fact, local conflicts had little impact on the Jenin region settlement system during the Late Ottoman period. As a result of the exploration and excavation of these sites, we have been able to revise our understanding of Ottoman Palestine substantially.<sup>1</sup>

### What is a Chiefdom?

Scholars have debated the exact definition of *chiefdom* for decades. Some, such as R. L. Carneiro, define it to be “an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief” (1981: 45). C. K. Chase-Dunn and T. D. Hall, applying world-systems theory, argue that chiefdoms provide momentum for the development of core–periphery relations and such relations need an organizational system, especially one that can control its economical resources (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 406). Thus, a chiefdom is a tool that can be used by a central power to collect revenue and maintain loyalties. Within a more complex chiefdom, there exist hierarchies of kinship that are used to redistribute goods produced by its members (Chase-Dunn 1992: 56–57). Villages that exhibit a tiered settlement system, in which larger villages were surrounded by smaller satellites, are likely to have been under the control of a complex chiefdom (Nissen 1988: 41; Lightfoot and Feinman 1982: 67–68). Each system would have a site-specific catchment

area that would produce enough surplus resources to feed the local community and the ruling chiefdom as well as provide extra revenue for the central ruler. Accordingly, it is possible that only 20 percent of the product would actually go to the *fellahin* while the rest was exchanged or utilized by other authorities.<sup>2</sup> Land ownership in such a system was therefore crucial for producing and amassing wealth. Moreover, as LaBianca has noted, food systems are not static but rather intensify through time, and, “as a region’s food system intensifies, its inhabitants tend to become increasingly land-tied due to increased investment in plough agriculture” (LaBianca 2000: 205).

The effect of this form of governance upon the settlement system of a region can be seen in the distribution of sites, their permanent locations, and in their perceived ability to produce goods. In Palestine, war between chiefdoms would generally erupt around fertile lands, which were the main source of wealth. Warfare, tribute, and a tiered system of land rights are characteristic of this type of society and all contribute to the maintenance of complex chiefdoms.

## The Role of Warfare

J. Haas suggests that cycles of warfare and peace have dominated human history, particularly in the ancient Near East. He proposes that it was not the full-time farmers who promoted and engaged in war, but those directly linked to “the rise of more complex and centralized polities” (Haas 2001: 340). A direct correlation between warfare and settlement patterns can be seen in the prosperity of those chiefdoms who gained more territory and, as a result, assumed a “central causal role in the eventual evolution of even more complex centralized chiefdom and state societies” (Haas 2001: 343).

Some scholars believe that warfare leads to abandonment, settlement shift, and population dispersion (Trigger 1968: 00), while others see it as a means of village aggregation (Bandy 2004). A population may disperse causing a wave of refugees who either establish new settlements, reestablish abandoned ones (breaking into smaller villages), or, alternatively, join existing settlements (Trigger 1968: 00). Warfare may also cause the fragmentation of large centers and the clustering of smaller ones (Trigger 1968: 69–73). Thus, while warfare may lead to settlement shift, it does not result in the total abandonment of a region. Smaller settlements or villages may be only minimally affected by war.

Local warfare was a response to the need to control more lands and thus produce more revenues. Chiefdoms needed to initiate warfare in order to maintain power and protect their economic interests. The preference of certain locations, such as the Jenin region with its plentiful resources, invited warfare between chiefdoms. However, local warfare often led to decreased land productivity, resulting in the need for the central state to suppress local warfare in order to increase the surplus and to collect revenue (Turchin and Korotayev 2006: 119–23). This often occurred after localized warfare exhausted local chiefdoms and restricted their power.

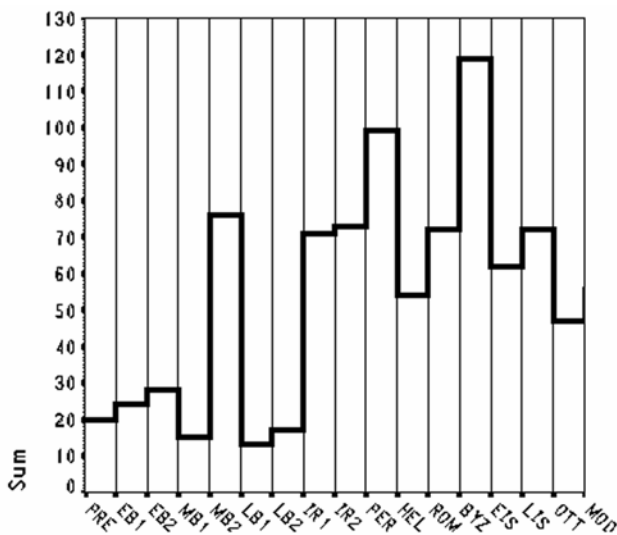
The Jenin region was and still is a buffer zone between northern and southern Palestine and represents a “contested periphery” between various external polities wanting to control it. More than thirty-four battles have taken place there (Cline 2000: 8). The region’s fertile lands and plentiful water resources formed a stable agrarian-based economy, which in turn led to stable, nucleated settlement systems. It is one of the most productive regions in Palestine today, partly due to the *fellahin* way of life still common there and their resilience in the face of change, unlike contemporary urban centers, which are subject to rapid change.

The settlement system trend for the Jenin region indicates that large settlements were distributed within five kilometers of each other, allowing them to share the area’s natural resources. Throughout the history of the region, four major site catchments were selected for settlement: Wadi Bal’ama, Sahel ‘Arrabeh, Marj Sanur and Wadi Tubas. Sanur and ‘Arrabeh were two fortified centers of Late Ottoman local chiefdoms and have continued ancient settlement systems of the region.

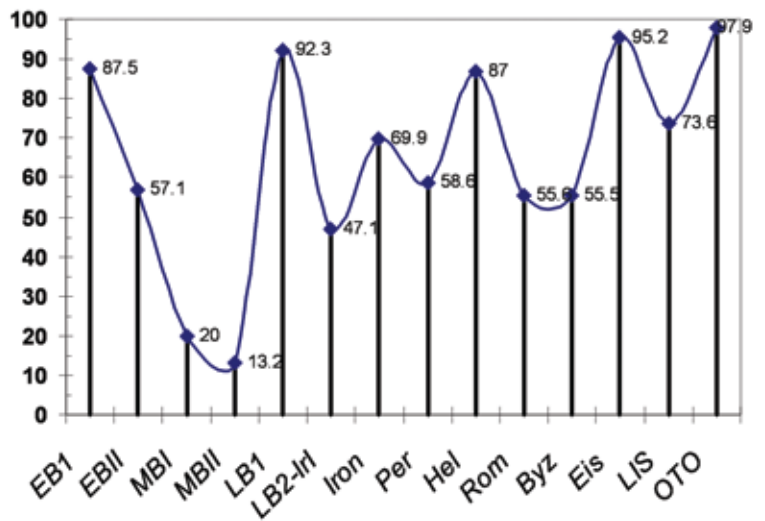
## Settlement Systems in the Jenin Region

The Jenin region cultural landscape has enjoyed stability since the Middle Bronze Age. The region reached peaks of occupation during three periods: the first occurred in the Middle Bronze Age, the second during the Persian period, and the third during the Byzantine period. In the Byzantine period, 50 percent of the total sites surveyed were occupied. The remaining periods showed similar occupational tendencies. **{au: this last sentence is still confusing; if all periods were similar, then how do the MBA, Persian and Byzantine periods stand out? Please clarify.}**

The period with the least continuity occurred during the Middle Bronze Age when only 20 percent of the sites continued from previous periods. Starting with the Late Bronze Age, continuity of settlement location increased, finally reaching 98



Occupational trend in the Jenin Region.



Sites per occupational period.

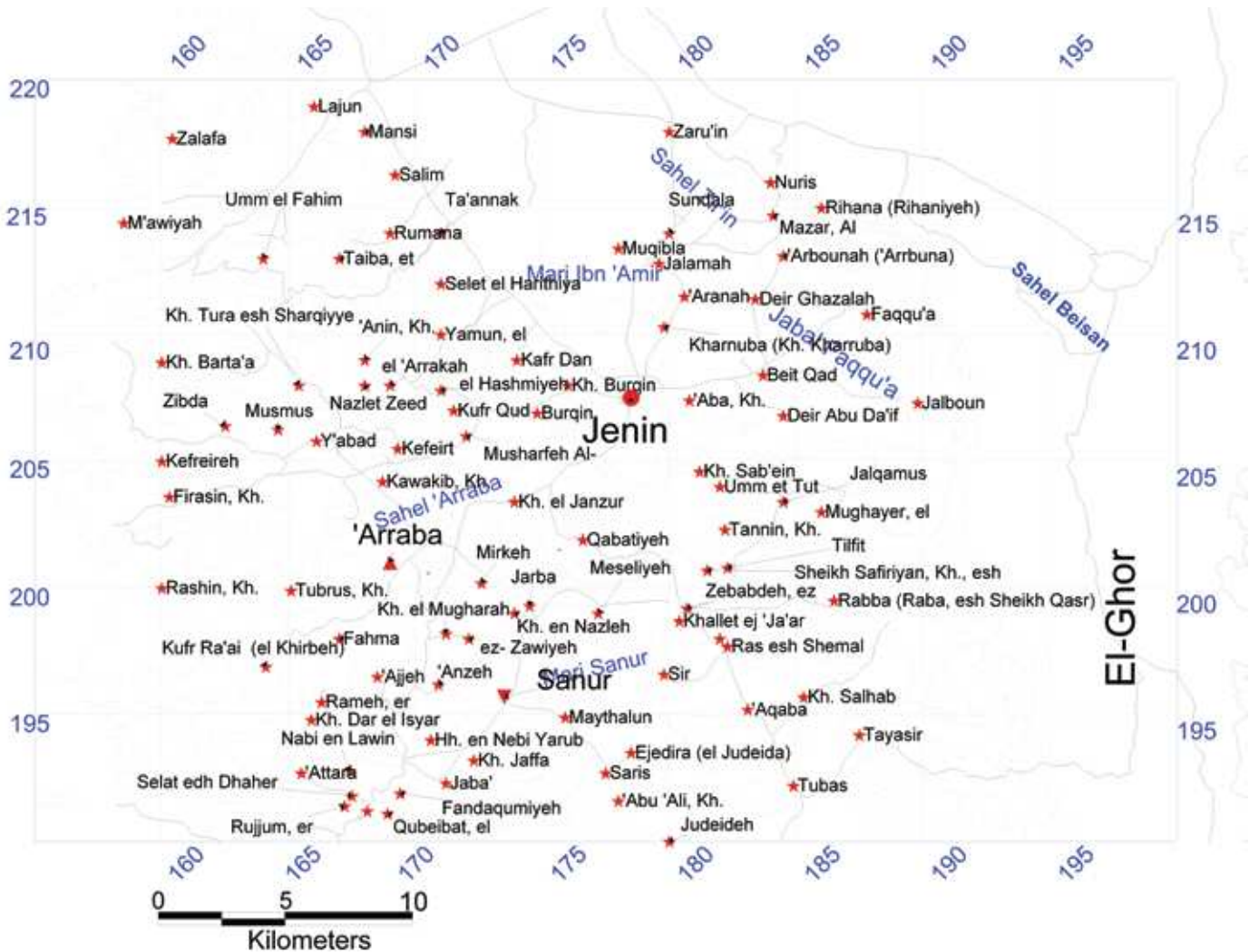
percent during the Ottoman period. Almost all Ottoman sites can be found at locations that had been previously occupied. Settlement continuity can also be seen in the same location during the various periods with the most intensified regions being Sahel 'Arrabeh and Wadi Bal'ama—mainly owing to fertile land and plentiful water sources.

The Ottoman administration divided the Jenin region between Liwa Lajjun (55 villages) and Liwa Nablus (226 villages). Nahiat Jenin was a subdivision within Liwa Lajjun (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977: 125–00). Notably, at this time, abandoned settlements on the eastern side were reoccupied, while occupation on the western side was continuous.

Of the ninety-seven settlements that can be dated to the Ottoman period according existing records, nineteen (or 20 percent) are archaeological sites not mentioned in any written records and seventy-eight (or 80 percent) are villages mentioned in various historical documents. *The 1596 Ottoman Defter* listed 53 percent of the total settlements. A few centuries later, *The Survey of Western Palestine, Memoirs of the*

*Topography, Orthography, Hydrology and Archaeology* recorded 79 percent of the total settlements in the Jenin region. Of these, only 21 percent were described as being in ruins with the rest still existing as living villages, including Kharnuba (Khirbet Kharruba), Khirbet el-Mugharah, en-Nabi Lawin, Rihana (er-Rihaniyeh), Khirbet Salhab, Khirbet en-Nebi Yarub, and Khirbet Tubrus. However, some later historical records indicate that the populations of these villages had moved to other nearby locations.

During the British Mandate, little of the local Ottoman governmental organization was changed. The Jenin region became a subsection of the Nablus district, which included approximately 70 percent of the settlements (Government of Palestine 1944; Hadawi 1970). Two conclusions can be reached when looking at the data sources. First, it must be acknowledged that archeological and historical records offer differing data sets when we attempt to reconstruct the regional Ottoman settlement system. Thus, only 33 percent of the sites with historical records had Ottoman-period archaeological data while

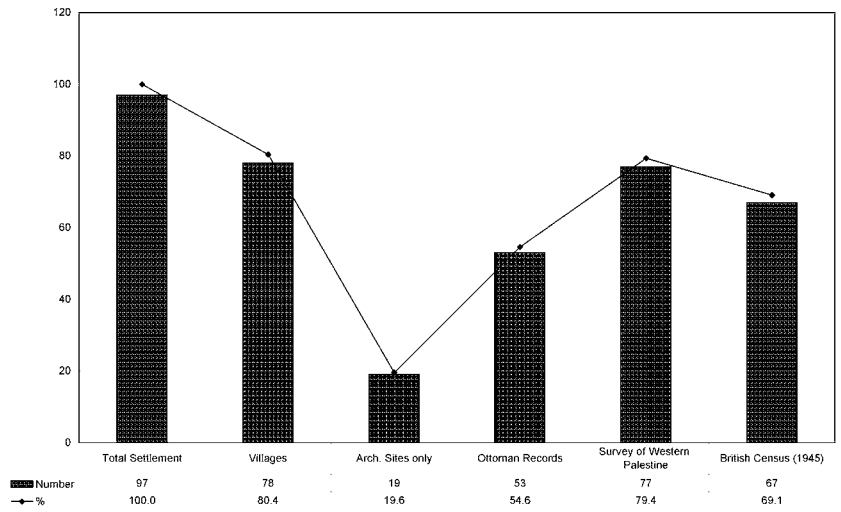


Map showing the Ottoman settlements in the Jenin region.

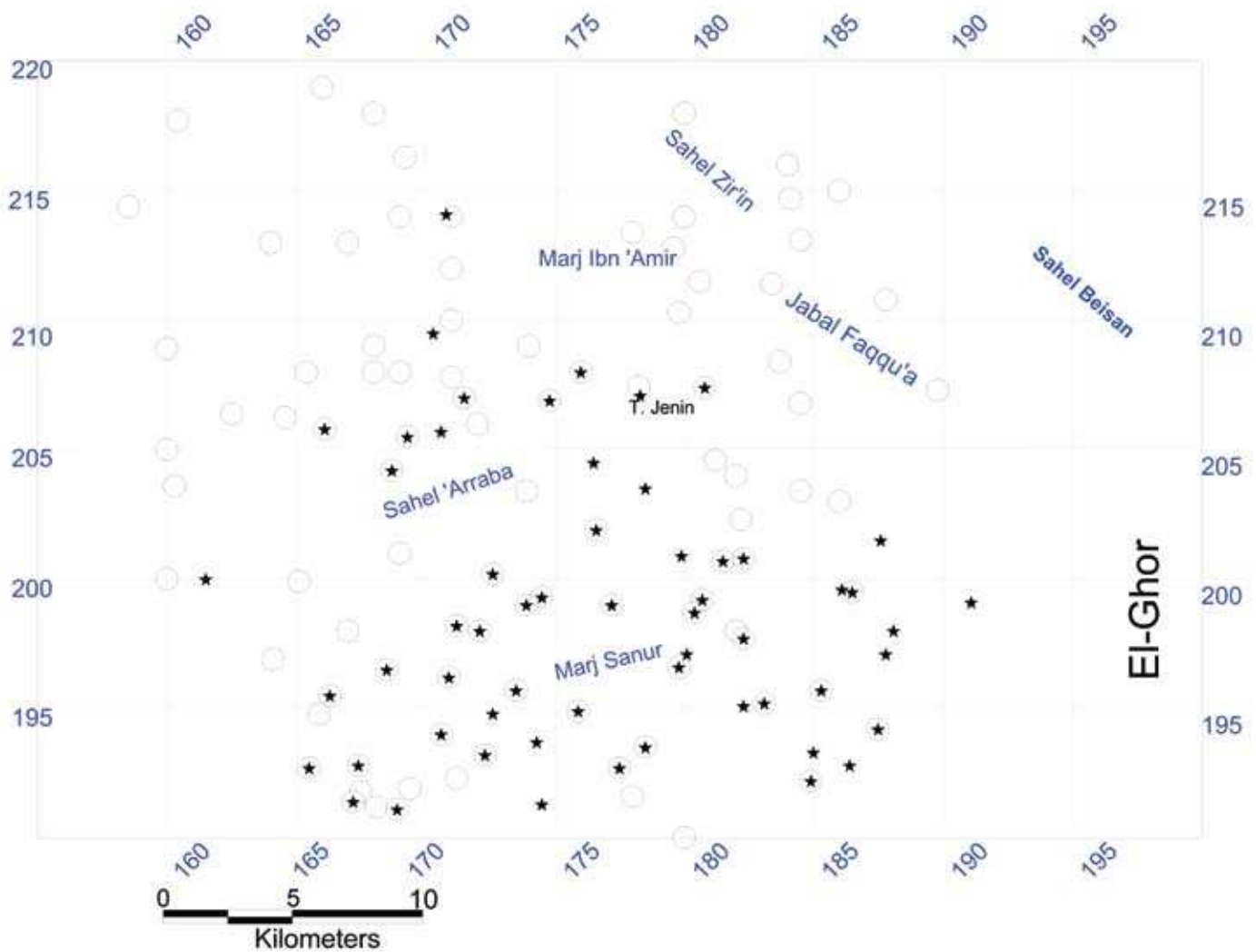
historical records mentioned 47 percent of the sites with such archaeological remains. Second, continuity is a major element characterizing the settlements of Tell Jenin. Only 34 percent of the settlements failed to survive while the rest continue to be occupied today.

Large-sized settlements were situated in the major plains, surrounded by a tier of smaller-size villages. The land-use distribution of these villages, as implied by the *Thiessen Polygon*, shows that major centers such as 'Arrabeh and Sanur controlled more land rather than small villages. The remaining villages had a net-like pattern of lands, which would have not been sufficient for subsistence. {au: what is a Thiessen Polygon??}

The occupational trend of the Jenin and the *Thiessen Polygon* both lead to the same conclusion regarding the land's ability to sustain its popula-



Distribution of the Ottoman settlements in the various sources.



Map showing the continuity of the Ottoman settlements of the Ottoman period. (Blank circles indicates Ottoman occupation only, black with star indicates continuity with previous periods.)

tion.<sup>3</sup> Estimates based on the archaeological data yield a figure of approximately 22,000 persons. Such a population needed approximately 44,500 hectares of agricultural land, which is close to what the Jenin's resources could provide at that time. It is most likely that the region endured great economic stress in order to supply the local chieftom with surplus revenues from lands under their control. The control of the productive lands is one of the main reasons that local warfare was initiated. B. W. Kang reached the conclusion that warfare increases in periods of low population and does not correspond to population increase (Kang 2000). The following example from 'Arrabeh best illustrates the point that control of more land resources rather than population increase initiated warfare.

### The Case of 'Arrabeh Village

'Arrabeh is located at a strategic point between Nablus and Jenin, and was mentioned by Abdul el-Ghani el-Nabulsi in 1184 CE. {au: so? Why is this mention significant?} The 1596 Ottoman *Defter* listed it as having 112 inhabitants. Evliya Çelebi, a seventeenth-century Turkish traveler, noted that 'Arrabeh consisted of one hundred houses (Stephan 1938: 88), which was just prior to the time Abdul el-Hady settled in the village and made it his clan's stronghold (Namir 1975: 00).

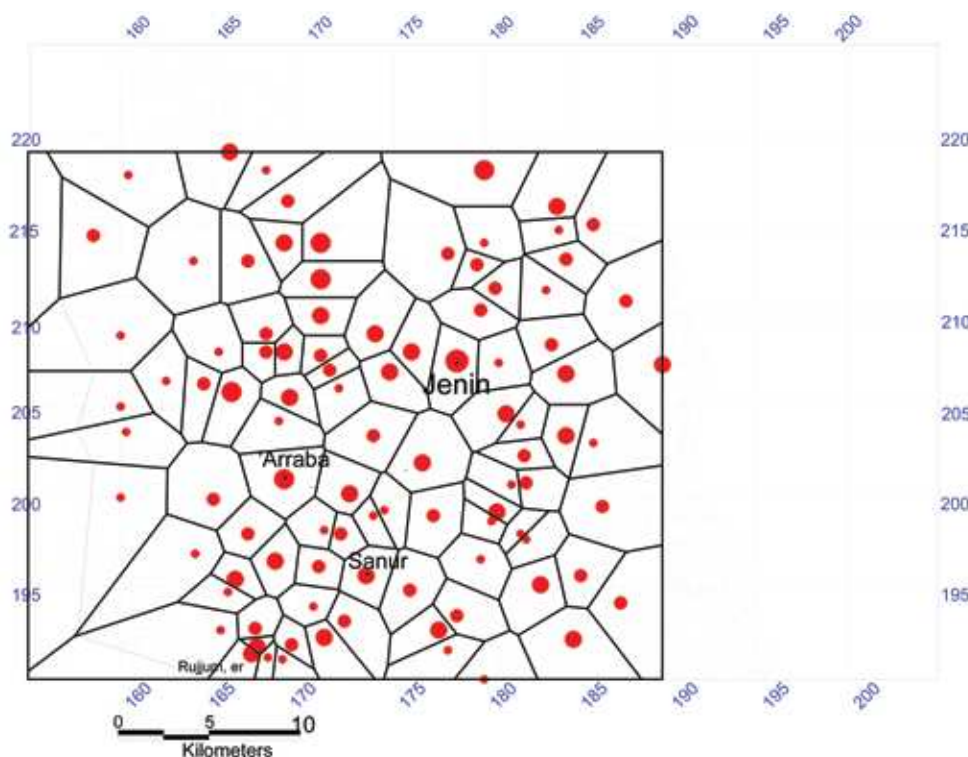
The Abdul el-Hady clan originated from within the Shaqran tribe, one of the main tribes who inhabited the el-Qastel of Balqa'a. Following the 1669 revolution, their Sheikh, Ziben, moved to Marj Ibn 'Amir and became the Ameer of Lajjun. After his death, his son Saleh moved to 'Arrabeh, while his other son Jarrar inhabited Sanur (Namir 1975: 00). However

the local tribes (Nazlaih and Mashaiqa) rejected Jarrar's part of the clan and so he moved to 'Arrabeh as well. The village became Saleh and Jarrar's stronghold, while their uncle, also named Jarrar, took Sanur as his stronghold. Abdul el-Hady's eldest son, Hussein, became one of the most powerful figures in Palestine during the Late Ottoman period.

According to Mahdi Abdul el-Hady, a descendent of the family (personal communication), the family had approximately 13,200 hectares distributed over forty-five villages in Nahiet Sahrawieh esh-Sharqiyah. Robinson (1857) mentioned that Hussein was very rich, and employed some two to three hundred yoke of oxen in cultivating Marj Ibn 'Amir. He built a fountain in Jenin, displaying his public spirit and extending his power beyond 'Arrabeh. The local war between the Abdul el-Hady clan and Jarrar, its sister clan, was inflamed by rumors fed by the centralized powers of the Egyptians (who ruled Palestine in the 1830s), Ottomans, and foreign consulates (Schölch 1986: 209–00).

One of the best first-hand accounts of the village is that by Mary Eliza Rogers, who visited 'Arrabeh at the end of February 1856 and stayed overnight at the palace of its governor. Her description implies that the village was well fortified: "We could see the town of 'Arrabeh, with its embattled walls and towers. . . . we entered its great iron-bound, well-guarded gates. This is one of the best walled towns in Palestine. . . . The houses all looked like small castles—they are square, and with parapets round their flat, terraced roofs" (1862: 216–17). H. V. Guérin described 'Arrabeh as being "divided into three quarters, one of which was once surrounded by a wall flanked with small towers. This wall is now in great part destroyed" (1875: 218).

During Ottoman rule, 'Arrabeh social structure consisted of the feudal family of Abdul el-Hady and the villagers who worked the land. The village spatial division mirrored the social one. The first quarter belonged to the "elite," formed of what was known as the palaces (*qusur*) quarter, surrounded by a defense wall. The second quarter belonged to the *fellahin*, built by the elite family's allies and supporters. This quarter was located next to and mixed in with the houses of the old village core, formed by the original villagers. From an archaeological point of view, the fortification walls and urban palaces would place such a village in the urban category. However, from a modern point of view, this center of power could hardly be considered an urban center.



Distribution of Ottoman settlements by size.

‘Arrabeh, like other settlements such as Sanur and the villages known as the crown villages (see *NEA X*), was a center of power whose main task was to collect revenue from the villagers. This required control of more land in order to gain more revenue. ‘Arrabeh controlled and collected its revenues from more than forty-two villages. The unique location of the Jenin region and ‘Arrabeh made it a “contested zone” between northern and southern Palestine. Controlling its strategic location meant dominating the main highway crossing the mountain. {au: what mountain?} {au: I don’t see where you illustrate the point about warfare being connected to low population density in this case study}

### The Fellahin and the Survival of a Tradition

In the mid-nineteenth century, local chiefdoms used warfare as a means to control the Jenin region’s landscape and thereby maintain the traditional settlement system. The *fellahin* settlement system had survived throughout the region’s long cultural history, from the Middle Age, however, warfare between local chiefdoms disrupted this system, leading to decreased economic output. When revenue from the land was cut, so too were the taxes that could be imposed by the central power thus the central power interfered in order to maintain a constant flow of revenue. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman central power invited the the local chiefdoms to join Parliament as a means of ending the local warfare that was affecting their revenue streams.

The historical documents and archaeological records differ on the effect warfare had on the settlement system. Some villages, such as Nabi Lawin, were described by archaeological surveys as ruins although they were mentioned by the Ottoman records and by Abdul el-Ghani en-Nabulsi as being thriving villages. In addition, some abandoned villages described as “destroyed” as a result of local warfare had no evidence in the material culture to suggest such destruction. For example, it was found that the village of Kharnuba had no archaeological evidence of the Ottoman period although it was mentioned as a battlefield where local tribes gathered their forces face-to-face.

Evidence of warfare can be seen in the fortification of major chiefdom strongholds such as ‘Arrabeh and Sanur. It was noticed that the fortification wall of ‘Arrabeh did not encircle the entire village; rather it was limited to the *qusur* quarter, that is, the quarter reserved for the ruling family. According to historical sources, villages such as ‘Arrabeh and Sanur were destroyed, but this is clearly not the case. In ‘Arrabeh, the *qusur* quarter was, for the most part, untouched and both villages continue to be occupied today.

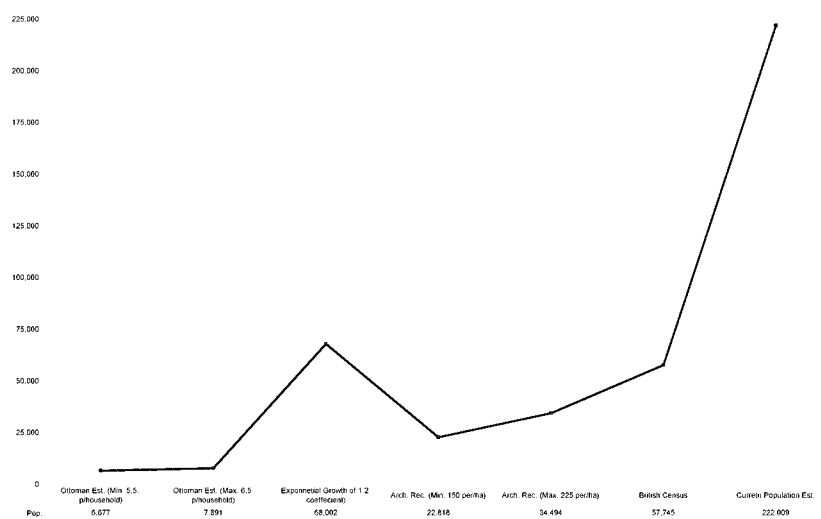
Finally, it is inaccurate to say that the local wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought destruction to the villages of Palestine. Palestine remained a peripheral region and a buffer zone between the competing core areas of Bilad esh-Sham, Mesopotamia, el-Jazera

al-A’rabiya, Egypt, and, later, Anatolia. Ottoman control of Palestine’s geography was key to maintaining control over distant lands. On the other hand, its distance from the core areas encouraged the development of local settlement systems. The system of power, better termed *stateless social system*, continues today. During the Ottoman period, the transformation from a simple chiefdom to a more complex one and eventually to a state was restricted by the central power.

It has been shown that the competing local chiefdoms turned to warfare as a means to control additional lands and maintain a good relationship with the central power. In the case of the Jenin region, it is astonishing to see that local warfare erupted between members of the same clan, rather than from a kinship alliance against other clans. Local warfare led to the exhaustion of resources, and put pressure on the *fellahin*. As a result, the village system that characterized the region mastered the skill of crisis survival, acknowledging that chiefdoms had limited impact on changing the settlement systems of the Jenin.

### Notes

1. In order to determine such effects on the Ottoman settlement systems of this region, I compared *The Ottoman Defter of 1596* with *The Survey of Western Palestine, Memoirs of the Topography, Orthography, Hydrology and Archaeology* (Conder and Kitchener 1881) as well as other historical documents. Those records were weighed against data obtained from the latest archaeological surveys in *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey* (Zertal and Mirkam 1992–1996, 2000; Zertal 2004, 2007) and the Birzeit University Survey of the region.
2. Based on Salem (2006); Abdulfattah (personal communication 2007).
3. Estimated population figures vary considerably depending on how one arrives at them. The expected growth of a region’s population, based on the exponential growth of an estimated population figure of approximately 150 and 220 persons per hectare, gives an estimate of 68,000 persons. A figure of seven to eight thousand persons can be estimated based on the sixteenth-century taxation records. This figure is much lower than that calculated by exponential growth. The estimate arrived at based on the archaeology, used here, differs again from these numbers.



Land-use pattern according to the Thiessen Polygon.

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